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## **“Fostering the Creation of Local Contents”**

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for the Round Table on Cultural Diversity in Knowledge Societies in Asia and the Pacific  
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### **Introduction**

I am the founder and kaumatua/elder, and a life member, of the New Zealand Maori Internet Society. Members of NZMIS have been at the forefront of pioneering and developing local indigenous Maori content on the Internet for the last seven or eight years.

My personal benchmark for “local” is the rural tribal village where I was born and raised, before I left for the city and for greater opportunities. For decades I have commuted the four hours to our village to remain involved, and to contribute my city found skills and knowledge to our rural and village affairs. It brings me down to earth.

Whenever a new policy or a new technology is introduced I find it instructive to imagine myself sitting in the sun with the tribal elders discussing the probable impact on our village. In most cases, our village perspective is ignored by the policy makers, for they are city people, in a far off capital, and often do not even know that we have a different perspective. I am often at odds with policy makers.

I want to focus on three aspects of local content:

- content by local people for local people,
- content that local people want, and
- how best to engage the people.

### **Content by Local People for Local People**

The people want to see themselves in this new media, as they do in any other media. They want to read, or preferably listen to, stories about themselves.

The people of my village, whether they live at home or like me, live out in the diaspora, want access to the stories of our village and our tribe. Those who live away from home want access to our whakapapa or remembered stories and genealogy, for that is the basis of Maori culture. They want news about Maori people everywhere.

We are finding that those with broadband access really appreciate video news clips and interviews. And we are discovering too that they want to learn the Maori language via the Internet. These things are important to Maori. They want access to their own culture, and they want the medium to reflect themselves.

And for them, like most others on the Internet, email is the killer application - the ability to stay in touch with friends and family, across Aotearoa New Zealand and for many of our families, across the world.

### **Content that Local People Want**

However, an often ignored aspect of this new Information & Communication Technology (ICT) is Entertainment. This medium is also about Entertainment. It should rightly be called IC&ET.

Those of us at this conference are representative of an elite, and we tend to focus on the things that are important to us and to that elite. We focus on information and knowledge, on culture and education, on communication and on the technology itself.

But the people themselves mostly just want to be entertained. In addition to their own Maori culture my people want access to the mass culture. They want access to music and video games, movies and sport.

The adoption of the Music CD, VCR and digital TV technologies by poor people in my country puts the lie to the concept of a digital divide in Aotearoa New Zealand. Poor people adopted those quite expensive technologies regardless of their economic circumstances, and they adopted and paid for access to those technologies in order to gain access to Entertainment, i.e. to music, movies and sport. In the poorest areas of Aotearoa New Zealand houses and shacks bristle with CD players, VCRs and digital TV dishes.

They don't yet bristle with computers, for the simple reason that there is very little of interest to local people on the Internet. There is no content that would excite their interest. The so-called "digital divide" is as much a content and a cultural divide as an economic divide.

The challenge is to compete with entertainment for the attention of the people.

### **What Does Excite the Interest of the "People"**

They want to be engaged through the imagination rather than the intellect. Entertainment does that.

Content that is important to politicians, bureaucrats, businesspeople and academics tends to try to engage the intellect first, and it bores people, and does not engage them.

The rule should be to engage the imagination first and foremost, and only then to engage the intellect.

So the proper people to be developing content for and with the people are poets and storytellers, visual artists, and increasingly as bandwidth broadens, filmmakers. Whether you are a politician or a bureaucrat, a business person or an academic, you should be paying creative writers and artists to produce your content.

In fostering the production of local content, we should elevate the creative and imaginative capacity of local communities to at least the same level as the intellectual. We should bring the artists from the margins into the mainstream.

### **The Creative Imperative**

There are also sound economic reasons for that, for the fastest growing sector of the global economy today is the creative sector.

Creativity is the new economic driver, and in my opinion the new society is the “creative society”, not the “information society” or the “knowledge society”. And the most important task for us today is to nurture the release of the creative potential of our people. That can only be done at the local level, at the grassroots or flaxroots level where the people are. It cannot be done globally or nationally.

And the most important role of the new technologies is to facilitate the release of that creative potential.

### **Summary**

People want local content that reflects their own culture and reflects themselves  
Entertainment is what the masses seek from all media, rather than information. We  
have to compete with that  
Engage with the people through the imagination  
Bring the artists from the margins into the mainstream.